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## BRIEF HISTORY

OF THE

# INFLUENZA,

*Which prevailed in New-York in 1807.*

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By SHADRACH RICKETSON,

*Physician in New-York.*

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

In writing a history of the Influenza, two plans might have been pursued.

One was, to give a circumstantial account of the disease, with the opinions of various authors, both ancient and modern. Another was, to exhibit a summary of it, as it appeared in 1807.

The former plan was first contemplated, and some progress made; but it was afterwards relinquished, and the latter adopted for the following reasons: first, it is a popular disease, and therefore a description of it may be acceptable to common, as well as to professional readers; secondly, most medical publications are now extended to an enormous size and expense, by which means their diffusion and usefulness are greatly lessened among many, even of the Faculty.

S. RICKETSON.

New-York, 4th Month 1808.

THIS disease is ranked by Dr. Cullen in the Class of *Pyrexia*, Order of *Profluvia*, Genus of *Catarrhus*, and Species *a contagione*.

The word *Influenza*, signifying influence, is said to be of Spanish or Italian derivation, and to have been given to

this disease from a general opinion entertained by ancient physicians and philosophers, that disorders were occasioned, and all things upon the earth were governed, by the influence of the stars or heavenly bodies.

It was known from the time of Hippocrates to that of Sydenham, by the name of *Febris Catarrhalis Epidemica*; but it was called by the latter author, *Tussis Epidemica*. Since his time, it has mostly been distinguished by the appellation of *Influenza*.

Though the present term is, comparatively speaking, modern, the disease is not so; for, on recurring to the history of medicine, we shall find it anciently and frequently described under one of the former names.

It is mentioned as prevailing often in England, in the course of the last century, particularly in the years 1762, 1775, and 1782; and, in a light degree, in 1795 and 1797; and again very generally in 1803.

By information lately received from Liverpool, I understand it was prevalent in that place last winter.

This disease has also prevailed in North America many times prior to 1807: particularly in 1733, 1737, 1747, 1756 & 7, 1761, 1772, 1781, 1789 & 90.

It likewise appeared, in a light degree, in the autumn of 1793, in Dutchess county, in this state, where I then practised; but, at no time, within my recollection, has it prevailed so generally and severely as in 1789 and 1807.

Before describing the history and symptoms of the disease, it may not be improper to observe the state of the weather during the two last summer months in which it appeared. This cannot be done better than by recurring to the meteorological tables of that time; from which it will appear that a great deal of rain had fallen; and that although the weather had been hotter than that of the preceding summer, there have been two remarkable transitions to a cool state of the air, viz. in the evening of the 28th of the second summer month, and on the 22d of the last. Indeed, some judged that the former sudden change was the cause of the complaint; but a few instances were observed nearly two weeks before that time. It might, however, have aggravated it; for it was remarked to increase in severity, and to spread rapidly soon afterwards, so that in 8, 10, or 12 days, it was at its height.

It being usual in recording the histories of epidemic diseases, to mention such disorders as immediately precede, accompany, or follow them, it may be proper to ob-

serve, that a violent species of ophthalmia prevailed somewhat generally before it. This affection of the eyes, though it was sudden and severe, and produced, in some instances, an immediate suffusion of the adnata, yielded mostly to the usual remedies. Some cases of this complaint continued after the appearance of the Influenza, but it did not secure the system against the latter, for some had both. I had one patient, whose affection of the eyes terminated in the *Fistula Lachrymalis*.

Some instances of the Influenza occurred as early as the middle of the second summer month, but it did not become general till about the first of the next, when it increased so rapidly, that in a few days, it was judged nearly one half of the citizens were affected with it.

It spared neither age nor sex, though more children escaped than adults; and I think fewer women were violently affected than men.\* It was most severe with people whose situation or occupation exposed them to the inclemencies of the weather. These suffered most frequently from relapses.

It continued to prevail till about the 20th of the last summer month; after which not many recent instances occurred, but some remained long ill who had the disorder severely.

I myself suffered a severe attack of it after the middle of the first fall month.

It is estimated that three fourths of the inhabitants had, sooner or later, more or less of the disease; but although it was so general, it rarely proved mortal, and did not, in every instance, require medical attendance, mostly yielding to regimen and simple domestic remedies.

This observation respecting its mildness and mortality, is to be understood in a general sense; for some cases occurred that proved very obstinate and almost callous to medicine, and a few terminated unfavourably; though many could not be said to die of the disease alone, most of those instances being sudden hemorrhages occasioned by the vi-

\* I have been directly informed, that, in the Friends' Boarding-School, in Dutchess county, containing nearly 100 scholars, the girls generally passed through the disease, before the boys were affected with it, though all under the same roof.

And a letter from Burlington, New-Jersey, mentions, that a family in that town, consisting of 13 or 14 persons, all escaped the complaint, whilst in many families, every individual was attacked with it, and no other family escaped it.

To what cause can these facts be owing?

ulence of coughing, or by accelerated pneumonic and other pulmonic complaints.

All those cases are, I suppose, included in the bills of mortality under the name of Influenza ; but these are admitted to be often inaccurate.

Perhaps no disease has ever been observed to affect so many people in so short a time, as the Influenza, almost a whole city, town, or neighbourhood becoming affected in a few days ; indeed much sooner than could be supposed to spread from contagion.

Mercatus relates, that when it prevailed in Spain, in 1557, the greatest part of the people were seized in one day.

Dr. Glass says, when it was rife in Exeter, in 1729, two thousand were attacked in one night.

Notwithstanding the general opinion long entertained, and handed down from one physician to another, of the contagious nature of this disorder, it is hoped there are now sufficient observations and incontestable facts to question, and even to disprove that idea : to adduce all which, would lead beyond the limits of this essay.

I have received no authentic information of any neighbouring city, town, or part of the country, being affected with it before this city ; but about the same time, or soon afterwards, it extended rapidly in every direction.

On revising my notes which I preserved of the Influenza, in the autumn of 1789, in Dutchess county, I find it remarked, "that the disease appeared first to the southward, and travelled gradually northward and eastward till it pervaded the continent."

Dr. Rush, in his account of the disease in that year, remarks, that he first observed it in Philadelphia, in some members of congress who arrived there from New-York.

From which account, and from its appearing here the last time, it is evident, that this city has been twice the origin and centre of the disorder ; but to what particular exciting or remote cause, whether to a certain state, modification, or change of the atmosphere, or to some other latent principle we may impute it, is not yet clearly ascertained, and must be left to be determined by accurate observation and future experience.

Various conjectures were formed respecting the succeeding health of the city ; some predicting, with much certainty, that it was a precursor of the *typhus icteroides*, or yellow fever, which has so frequently and severely visited this place ; but experience has shown the fallacy of such an

opinion, for, in no season for several years past, has that disease been more rarely observed here; others judging it, with more probability, to be a modification, or a substitute for it.

Neither before the appearance of the Influenza, during its prevalence, nor after it, did I know of any epidemic or unusual disease in the city, except the ophthalmia already mentioned, scarcely any other disorder of much importance or severity appearing in the time of it.

The symptoms which characterized the disease, were not much different from those that attend a heavy cold. The severest cases were generally ushered in with an ague, chill, or sensation of cold; a hoarseness, soreness, and, as some expressed it, a rawness of the throat, lungs, and stomach, accompanied with an urgent cough or hawking. This last symptom was so general and severe, that people were almost constantly heard coughing or hawking in meetings and along the streets. Pains in the head, chest, back, or limbs, and frequently in all, with a lassitude, restlessness, and great prostration of strength, almost universally attended. The pain in the head was often severe, accompanied in a few instances, with a vertigo or slight delirium. In some cases, it centred much in the frontal sinuses; in others, it affected the jaws, exciting great soreness in the parts, with tooth-ach; and in a few, it pervaded the ears, occasioning tinnitus aurium and deafness.

The pain in the breast resembled, in some instances, that of Pneumonia, particularly the Peripneumonia notha, or Intercostal Rheumatism. Those in the back and limbs, were often severe and similar to the pains accompanying the accession of Typhus and some other fevers.

When the Trachea and Larynx were much affected, the respiration and cough exhibited that peculiar croaking noise which takes place in the Cynanche Trachealis or Croup.

Sometimes a diarrhoea, at others, a nausea, but more frequently a constipation of the bowels, with thirst, a furrowed tongue, quick pulse, but not very full, high coloured urine, and more or less fever, accompanied the complaint.

A deprivation of the smell, taste, and hearing, a sneezing and running at the nose, were likewise very general symptoms. No disease, perhaps, bears a greater likeness to it in the accession, than the Measles, which followed not long after, and are still prevalent in the city.

Indeed, the similarity or connexion between the two diseases is so great, that some writers have remarked, that one

frequently or generally succeeds the other. This was the case in 1789 and 1790, in which years, both these disorders prevailed.

I had one patient severely attacked with the disease, whose pulse rose and continued several days about double the number of the healthy standard; but she recovered.

The blood let in this epidemic did not generally appear much sify, except in some cases attended with Pneumonic symptoms; nor did the crassaméntum often exhibit that cup-like shape which is so commonly observed in other diseases of the order of Phlegmasiae.

The most robust patients very commonly swooned under the operation of venesection.

Some who had the complaint severely, with violent coughs, discharged blood from the nose, lungs, or by stool. A few fatal instances occurred of the two last kinds.

Uterine hemorrhages and abortions took place in some women, whose coughs were very urgent.

Some, after having passed through the height of the disease, being intemperate, or exposed to cold or wet, suffered relapses, which often proved more severe and lingering, than the original complaint. The greatest number of deaths were from this cause, or from consequences of the disorder.

The treatment of this disease was not conducted on the same plan by all physicians, some treating it merely with a dietetic regimen and simple domestic remedies, while others used blood-letting and copious evacuations.

The middle plan was, I think, attended with the best effects; for, I generally observed, that bleeding and strongly depleting remedies greatly weakened the constitution, and rendered the convalescence slow and tedious.

A large proportion of those affected were so slightly ill as to require little or no medicine, besides the treatment usual in cases of common colds; but when a person was seized with a violent attack of the complaint, I advised to lie in bed, or to keep in a room of moderate temperature, and to promote a gentle perspiration, by bathing the feet and legs in warm water, and by drinking freely of warm infusions of sage, catnep, thoroughwort, or snakeroot.

Wine-whey and mustard-whey were also used by some, and were very proper in debilitated constitutions, and for ancient people.

If these means were found insufficient to bring on a mo-

lerate sweat, it was further encouraged by the addition of spirits of Mindererus, or Dover's sweating powder.

When the preceding remedies proved ineffectual in promoting a free perspiration, and the pain and other symptoms continued very distressing, the general warm bath, or the semicupium, was found very successful.

Rubbing, or bathing the patient in warm vinegar, or enveloping him in flannel blankets wrung out of it, as hot as could be borne, has succeeded in some cases, after all other means have failed.

The utility and success of the last application are not confined to the Influenza, but may be extended to various other disorders in which a copious sweat cannot be procured by other means.

In cases attended with much nausea, it was advisable to rinse the stomach with warm water, carduus, or chamomile tea; and when that symptom was distressing, it often became necessary to administer gentle emetics of ipecacuanha, antimonial wine, or white vitriol; which, when a sweat could not be procured in the early part of the disease, by any of the means already mentioned, being given in nauseating doses, often had a good effect in promoting that excretion.

After the operation of an emetic, if the sickness continued, the effervescing draught, or the saline anti-emetic mixture, was found useful both in removing the nausea, and in promoting a moisture on the surface of the body.

The bowels being generally costive, early attention became necessary to open them with some purging medicine, particularly with those of the saline kind, such as Glauber's salt, soluble tartar, or crystals of tartar; some preferred jalap and calomel; others used castor oil; and with many, Lee's pills were a popular remedy; but I know of no cathartic better adapted generally in the complaint than jalap or rhubarb and vitriolated tartar, thoroughly rubbed together, particularly for those whose stomachs rejected the other kinds.

Calomel was occasionally added to the last, when it did not prove sufficiently powerful. Those who had long neglected to take physic, and whose bowels were not readily moved, were much relieved by the seasonable use of purgative injections.

The cough and soreness of the throat and breast, being early and urgent symptoms, required particular attention.—They were kept moderate, and were relieved by the liberal use of mucilaginous drinks, such as infusions of wheat bran,

pearl barley, quince seeds, marshmallows, red-elm bark, flax-seed, or liquorice, or of some of the demulcent gums, with the occasional interposition of oily medicines and opiates ; the last of which were found frequently and indispensably necessary to appease the cough, and to procure sleep.

Opium, however, was rarely observed to give that ease in the early part of the disease, before a perspiration took place, which it did afterwards.

Soothing and instantaneous relief was obtained in some cases attended with incessant coughing, great soreness, and difficult respiration, by inhaling the vapours of the decoctions of mucilaginous or demulcent herbs ; or, when these were not accessible, those of warm water only, through some suitable apparatus.

Mudge's Inhaler is well adapted for this purpose, and may be easily fitted and kept in every family ; or, when that cannot be obtained, a coffee-pot, or a common funnel, may be substituted, and used to considerable advantage.

The receiving of the vapours of the infusions or decoctions of emollient vegetables, or even of simple warm water into the lungs by inhalation, is a sovereign remedy, too little known, and too much neglected, not only in the Influenza, but in various other catarrhal, pulmonic, and anginose affections.

I omitted to mention blood-letting as an early remedy in this disease, judging it not generally necessary in the treatment of it ; in which, I am sensible, I differ from many practitioners. I have already remarked, that the pulse was rarely full or hard, that the blood was not, except in some particular cases, much sity—that a languor and prostration of strength universally accompanied—and that the most robust patients generally swooned under the operation : for which reasons, I rarely bled in any considerable quantity, except in plethoric strong constitutions, attended with a full hard pulse, and severe pain in the head or chest, threatening phrenitic or pneumonic affections, when I did not hesitate to practise and repeat it, if necessary, according to the nature and urgency of the symptoms, with the occasional use of blistering and other remedies usual in such cases. Topical bleeding, either by cupping, or by the application of leeches, to some part of the chest, I considered as more admissible and better adapted than free blood-letting from the arm.

Blisters were useful, not only in relieving the pains in the chest, but in abating the soreness of the throat and the distressing sickness and vomiting which attended some severe

cases of the complaint, and which did not yield to other remedies.

Strong sinapisms applied to the feet, had a good effect in relieving the head, throat, and chest. These with stimulating and rubefacient liniments, with a portion of laudanum, were also useful applications to the chest, when blisters were omitted.

After the crisis of the disease, and after the abatement of the catarrhal symptoms, the consequent fever in some cases, put on an intermittent or remittent form, when the bark, bitters, and other usual remedies in fevers of that kind, became indicated. The same treatment, with chalybeates and the vitriolic acid, was necessary, when the disorder was succeeded by great debility, or profuse night sweats.

A few instances were said to put on a typhoid character, or to degenerate into a fever of that type; when they were to be treated accordingly; but I did not meet with many of this kind.

Before closing this account of the Influenza, it may not be improper to mention that soon after the disease became general in this city, I published a letter, containing a short description of it, with the mode of treatment, designed and adapted principally for popular use; and that, after the disorder had nearly disappeared, I issued a circular letter;\* directed to the physicians throughout the United States, requesting their attention and assistance in transmitting to me accounts of it in the several places where they resided, in order to write a circumstantial history of it. In consequence, and in compliance with which, I received various communications from different parts of the Union.

This information I intended to incorporate with my remarks, or to add by way of supplement to them; but, on reviewing those several communications, and on summing them together, I find very little important matter to record in addition to my own observations on the subject, or different from them. I shall, however, note a few particulars.

Most of the accounts mention its appearance not until a considerable time after its prevalence in this city. It evidently first appeared here, and spread gradually and rapidly in every direction, its progress being clearly traced from one town and country to another.

Letters from Pittstown in Rensselaer county, and from Whitehall, in Washington county, in this state, say, that it

\* This letter will be annexed to this History.

appeared in those places about the middle of the last summer month. A person informed me he was attacked with it on Lake Champlain, on his passage from Canada to this city, in the fore part of the first Fall month.

Another letter from Ovid, near the Seneca lake, states, that the disease was not frequent there till the latter part of the last Summer, and the beginning of the first Fall month ; and that the latter may be considered the month in which it prevailed in that part of the country ; and that it was about two weeks earlier at the Seneca river, and gradually progressed between the lakes to the southward.

By a letter from the Bay of Quinti, in Upper Canada, it appears not to have passed through that country till the two last Fall months.

In most of the communications received, in answer to my Circular Letter, the symptoms of the disease are described as being more inflammatory, and denoting a greater phlogistic diathesis in the system, than were observed in this city. This may account for the more liberal use of the lancet, which appears to have been used in many places as a general remedy ; but it is no new thing that other diseases are attended with different symptoms at different seasons, and even in different places at the same season ; and that they consequently require different modes of treatment.

During the prevalence of the disease in this city, I observed no unusual sickness among domestic animals ; but several of the accounts received, mention, that horses and dogs were disordered ; one saying, that "many died :" another, that "a singular and unusual affection prevailed among horses during the month of August, and fore part of September, viz. an extraordinary discharge of saliva (not the ordinary frothing from fresh grass but a constant and excessive flow of pure saliva from the mouth, without any morbid appearance of the parts of the mouth itself, or any other of the animal, except that the beast, in some instances appeared at times a little hollow ; but otherwise in ordinary health and spirits. A young mare of about five years old, having her head confined over a trough, discharged two quarts in about an hour and an half, yet she kept her flesh and worked well. This appearance, for it can scarcely be called a disease, prevailed, and was remarked by many all over the country for many miles around, and lasted, like the Influenza, about 18 or 20 days.)"

"The same account says further, that the Influenza was then called the "Horse distemper, by which name, it has

been almost universally known, among the common people, for 30 or 40 miles around."

## CIRCULAR.

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*To the Physicians in the different parts of the United States.*

The recording of epidemic diseases having been long observed by physicians to be useful in developing their history, prevention, and cure, a request is hereby made of the physicians throughout the Union, to collect from actual observation, and to transmit to me in New-York, an account of the Influenza, which is now rapidly spreading in different parts of the continent.

The particulars, on which information is more particularly requested, are the following:

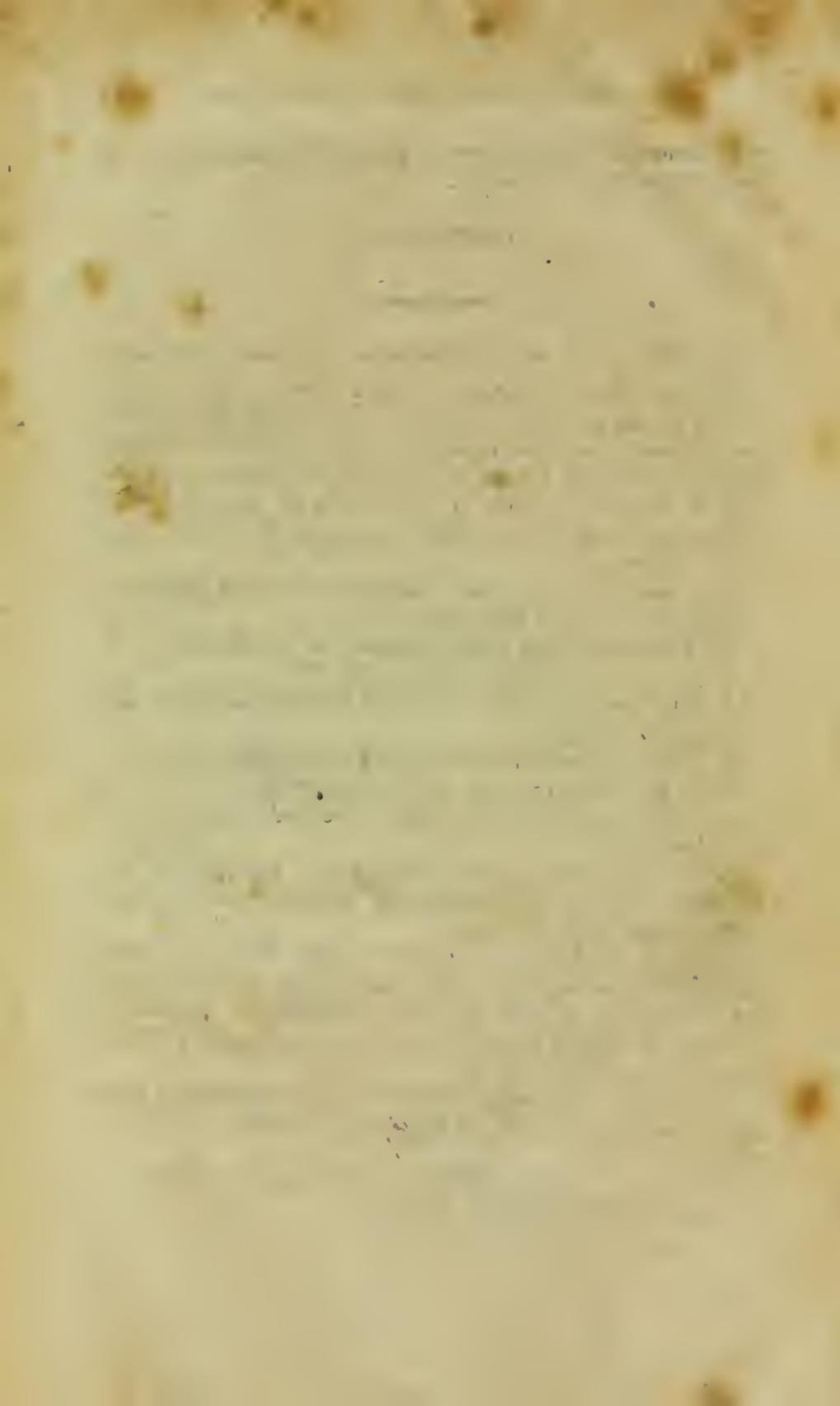
1. The time of the first appearance of the disease.
2. The symptoms that characterized it.
3. The remedies that were found most successful in alleviating and curing it.
4. What proportion of the inhabitants were affected with it: whether it proved mortal: and in what number of cases.
5. What diseases immediately preceded, accompanied, or followed it.
6. Whether any unusual sickness was observed to prevail about the time among domestic animals, such as horses, cattle, sheep, dogs, and cats.

Though obtaining an accurate history of the Influenza, in different places, was the particular object of this address, yet information of any other late epidemic, or uncommon sickness, deserving notice or record in the annals of Medicine, will also be acceptable.

It is desired, that communications may be made as soon as convenient, post paid, or by private conveyances, if such present.

SHADRACH RICKETSON.

*New-York, 8th mo. 25th, 1807.*







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